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(Cheta) Kassapa,gotta Sutta

The Discourse on Kassapa,gotta (and the Trapper) | S 9.3

Also called **Cheta Sutta**, The Discourse on the Trapper

Theme: Even when no one heeds the Dharma, we should keep to our own practice

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2014

1 Sutta significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS

1.1.1 Summary. Kassapa,gotta, living in a certain (unnamed) forest grove [§1] meets a trapper and exhorts him against such a wrong livelihood [§2]. However, the trapper is too engrossed in his stalking to pay any attention to what Kassapa,gotta is saying. A forest devata [§3] appears to Kassapa,gotta [§4] and advises him in three verses essentially saying that the hunter is dense, and it is the wrong time to teach the Dharma. Instead, Kassapa,gotta should be focusing on his own practice. [§§5-7]

1.1.2 The kind devata

1.1.2.1 **The (Cheta) Kassapa,gotta Sutta** is remarkable in that it does not mention the Buddha at all and that it is a forest devata (or dryad) who is actually a better teacher than the monk. From the Sutta, albeit a very short one, we can surmise that he is not an awakened monk, perhaps not even a streamwinner. The deva,¹ desiring to arouse spiritual urgency [1.1.3] in Kassapa,gotta, appears to him and admonishes him not to trouble himself with such a foolish person, but to direct his efforts to his own practice and attainment.

The devata's intercession reminds us of **Dh 158**, which says:

*Sādhu dassanaṃ ariyānaṃ
sannivāso sadā sukhā
adassanena bālanāṃ
niccam eva sukhī siyā*

Good is the seeing of the noble saints,
ever happy it is associating with them.
Not seeing the foolish,
one would always be happy. (Dh 158) = SD 24.6b(5.4)

This verse is uttered by the Buddha in connection with the greedy monk Upananda, who teaches the Dharma only for his personal material benefit.²

1.1.2.2 On the other hand, Kassapa,gotta should be admired for trying to admonish a trapper to give up his cruel and wrong livelihood. Although he fails to convince or convert the trapper, his teaching effort shows his concern and compassion for the trapper. Even the Buddha is known, on various occasions, to have taught the Dharma to an audience that does not seem to be moved by his teaching. [2].

1.1.3 Samvega

1.1.3.1 *Samvega* or “spiritual urgency” is a concept closely connected with the “seeing” of the Buddha and some holy persons, or more commonly, of experiencing some seemingly mundane event³ that gives us a vision of true reality, so that we are moved to spiritual effort to cultivate ourselves. Such a powerful emotion may arise at the realization of the karmic consequences of an action, whether done by oneself or others, that is, as “a knowing that is accompanied by moral fear.”⁴ Essentially, “moral fear” is an “other-regarding” conduct moved by a healthy fear of the karmic repercussions and moral accountability.

¹ Cf the story of Tapussa and Bhallika who are advised by a deva, a past relative, to meet the newly awakened Buddha (V 1:3; VA 5:959-961; MA 2:185 f; BA 9; J 1:80 f); and of an earth-bound deva or nymph, who tries to seduce the monk Samiddhi: (**Devatā**) **Samiddhi S** (S 1.20), SD 21.4.

² See **Upananda Sakya,putta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 12.2/3:139-142), which is a free version of **Dabbha Puppha J** (J 400/3:332-336).

³ On samvega & the 4 sights, SD 1.11 (3). **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16) speaks of visiting the 4 holy places as inspiring *samvega* (D 16,5.7), SD 9.

⁴ *Samvego nāma sah'ottapaṃ nāṇaṃ* (VvA 213). On moral fear (*ottappa*), see SD 1.5 (4) & SD 2.5 (1).

1.1.3.2 The *Pali-English Dictionary* defines as “agitation, fear, anxiety; thrill, religious emotion (caused by contemplation of the miseries of the world).” It is called “spiritual emotion” in the sense that it moves one to seek a deeper level of self-understanding or one is profoundly moved by a direct vision of reality. It is one of the most powerful of Buddhist terms, and refers to a sort of spiritual crisis that results from directly perceiving the truth, even momentarily.

1.1.3.3 For a lay person, this usually results in disillusionment with worldly life, often leading to renunciation, whereas in the case of a monastic, it urges him to exert every effort in spiritual practice until the goal is attained. “A feeling of urgency,” *saṃvega*, is an overpowering experience of awe or a religious experience that induces us to ask the deep questions of life and seek their answers.

1.1.3.4 In view of such benefits, **the Somanassa Sutta** (It 37/29 f) declares that by feeling samvega [spiritual urgency] in those things that evoke samvega, and by rightly rousing effort in feeling samvega,⁵ we will be gain two benefits, that is, living here and now with great mental ease, and being wise in rousing effort,⁶ for the destruction of the mental influxes.⁷ This refers to the attaining of arhathood, as in the case of Kassapa,gotta in the Sutta [§8].

1.2 KASSAPA,GOTTA. The protagonist of this Sutta (S 9.3) is **Kassapa,gotta 2**, who is probably identical with **Kassapa,gotta 1**, the protagonist of **the Pañkadhā Sutta** (A 3.90).⁸ This probably simply refers to his clan, Kassapa, or is a generic name. We do not know any other name of his.

2 Teaching the unconverted

2.1 COMMENTARIAL DETAILS. **The (Cheta) Kassapa,gotta Sutta** (S 9.3) is an example of an untimely Dharma exhortation. Kassapa,gotta tries to persuade the trapper from his cruel livelihood. The trapper, engrossed in his trade, is simply unwilling or unable to listen. The Commentary (SA 1:290) gives us some narrative details.

2.1.1 It is said that a deer-hunter, having finished his breakfast, decided, “I will kill deer” (*mige vadhissāmīti*). In the forest, he saw a red deer (*rohita,miga*) and thought, “I will strike it with a spear!” (*sattiyā nam paharissāmīti*). While the hunter was preparing himself to do this, passed by the elder Kassapa,gotta, who was having his day-rest (meditating) not far away.⁹

The elder told the hunter, “Lay follower, this is killing (*pāṇātipāta*). It brings about a state of deprivation (*āpāya*) and shortens your life. You should be able to do something else, such as farming or trading, to maintain a wife. Don’t commit such cruel karma!”¹⁰

He stood, thinking, “The great *paṃsukūla* (dust-heap cloth) elder speaks,” trying to listen.¹¹

Then, the elder, with his big toe, stoked the fire, thinking, “I will inspire in him a desire to listen!”

He saw the fire with his eyes, and heard with his ears, but his mind thinking,

“The deer must have gone to a certain spot, or gone down to a certain ford. Now, having gone there I will kill it, and having eaten as much venison as I wish, I will carry the rest on a pole, and bring it back to please my children!” he ran after the hoofprints.¹²

Thus, the elder was teaching the Dharma to such a scattered mind (*vikkhitta,citta*). (SA 1:290)

⁵ *Saṃvejanīyesu thānesu saṃvejanena saṃvegassa ca yoniso padhānena.*

⁶ *Yoniso āradhho.* Later, *yoniso padhānena* (see below in sutta).

⁷ “**Mental influxes**,” *āsava*. See D 16,10.4 n, SD 9.

⁸ A 3.90/1:236-239 @ SD 47.18.

⁹ The whole para: *So kira miga,luddako pāto ’va bhuñjivā “mige vadhissāmīti araññaṃ pavittḥo ekaṃ rohita,migam disvā “sattiyā nam paharissāmīti anubandhamāno therassa paṭhama,sutte vutta,nayen’eva divā,vihāraṃ nisinnassa avidūrena pakkamati.* (SA 1:290)

¹⁰ *Upāsaka, pāṇātipāto nāmesa apāya,samvattaniko appāyuka,samvattaniko, sakkā aññena ’pi kasi,vañijj’ādi,-kammena dāra,bharaṇaṃ kātum, mā eva,rūpaṃ kakkhaḷa,kammaṃ karohīti āha.* (SA 1:290)

¹¹ *So ’pi “mahā,paṃsukūlika-t,thero kathetīti gāravena thatvā sotum āradhho.*

¹² *Asuka-ṭ,thānaṃ migo gato bhavissati, asuka,titthaṃ otiṇṇo, tattha nam gantvā ghātetvā yāvad-icchakaṃ maṃsam khādītva sesaṃ kājen ’ādāya gantvā puttake tosessāmīti evaṃ migass’eva anupadaṃ dhāvati.*

2.1.2 Commenting on the word “addressed”: (by the devata), the Commentary gives us this interesting detail:

The devata illuminated himself, thinking, “This elder is like one doing carpentry without wood, or harvesting without a field. His own karma is destroying him! Let me reprove him.”¹³

2.2 Although Kassapa,gotta fails to convince or convert the trapper, his efforts to admonish the trapper shows his concern and compassion for him. Even the Buddha is known, on various occasions, to have taught the Dharma to an audience that does not seem to be moved by his teaching.

Among the discourses that record the Buddha himself teaching those who remain unconverted include the following:

Soṇa,daṇḍa Sutta	the status-conscious Soṇa,daṇḍa	D 4,26/1:125 f	SD 30.5
Udumbarikā Siha,nāda Sutta	the foolish Nigrodha and his followers	D 25,24/3:57	SD 1.4
Mūla,pariyāya Sutta	the arrogant brahmin monks	M 1,194/1:6	SD 11.8
Kakacūpama Sutta	the lustful monk Moḷiya Phagguna	M 21,7.4/1:124	SD 38.1
Alagaddūpama Sutta	the lustful monk Aritṭha	M 2,27/1:132	SD 3.13
Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta	the deluded monk Sāti	M 38,5.3/1:258	SD 7.10
Kalāra Sutta	Moḷiya Phagguna leaves the order	S 12.32/2:50	SD 83.6

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The Discourse on Kassapa,gotta (and the Trapper)

S 9.3

- 1 At one time, the venerable Kassapa,gotta was dwelling in a certain forest grove.
 - 2 Now, at that time, when the venerable Kassapa,gotta had gone for his day-rest,¹⁴ admonished a certain trapper.¹⁵
 - 3 Then, a devata haunting that forest grove, desiring to inspire a sense of urgency in the venerable Kassapa,gotta, approached him.¹⁶
 - 4 Having gone up to the venerable Kassapa,gotta, he addressed in verses, thus:¹⁷
- 5 *Giri,dugga,caram chetam
appa,paññam acetasam* The hunter, roaming in the rugged hills,
with little wisdom, mindless [dull],¹⁸

¹³ *Ajjhabhāsīti* “*ayam thero adārum tacchanto viya akhette vappanto viya attano 'pi kammaṃ nāseti, etassāpi codessāmi nan 'ti abhāsi*, SA 1:290)

¹⁴ “Day-rest,” *divā,vihāra* (lit, “day residence”), a time of seclusion for monastics to rest and meditate, esp after the noon meal, eg: V 1:28, 3:208; D 2:130, 182, 356, 3:17-22 passim; M 1:108 f, 147, 229, 359, 447, 502, 2:65 passim; S 1:129, 130, 132-135, 3:91, 235; A 3:75, 4:262, 264, 356, 438; U 5, 35; Pv 2.10.1/28*; Ap 2:404, 473*; (pl) *divā,vihārā*: S 1:193; Thī 48a/128; Ap 1:284*, 2:417*; *divā.vihāra,gato: vihāra* 3:37 f passim; S 1:146, 148, 197 f, 203, 225, 233: for other refs search CPD: *divāvihār** & *divā vihār**.

¹⁵ *Tena kho pana samayena āyasmā kassapa,gotto divā,vihāra,gato aññataram chetam ovadati*. Comy says that he is a “deer hunter” (*miga,luddaka*, SA 1:290).

¹⁶ *Atha kho yā tasmim vana,saṅḍe adhivatthā devatā āyasmantam kassapa,gottam samvejetu,kāmā yen 'āyasmā kassapa,gotto ten 'upasānkami*. For further details, see (2.1.1).

¹⁷ For further details, see (2.1.2).

¹⁸ CPD (with trs added): **a-cetasa** (mfn) = *acetana* (here, “thoughtless”): Dh 248 (vl for *asaññata*, “unperceiving,” DhA 3:356,21 = *acittaka*, “mindless”); J 5:66,12* (*mūlho ~o*, “confused, thoughtless”), 6:12,24* (*mūgo pakkho ~o*, “dumb, lame, dull”; = *acittako*); S 1:198,30* (*appa,paññam ~am*, “with little wisdom, mindless”; SA 1:290 = *kāra-ṇa,jānana,samatthena cittena rahitam*, “deprived of a mind that is able to know causes (and effects)”).

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| | <i>ākāle ovadam bhikkhu
mando 'va paṭibhāti maṃ</i> | a monk who admonishes (him), untimely,
strikes me as dull indeed! | 767 |
| 6 | <i>Suṇāti na vijānāti
āloketi na passati
dhammasmiṃ bhaññamānasmiṃ
attham bālo na bujjhati</i> | Who hears, but learns not, [understands not,]
who looks, but sees not—
when the Dharma is being spoken,
the fool understands not its meaning. [199] | 768 |
| 7 | <i>Sace 'pi dasa pajjote
dhārayissasi kassapa
n 'eva dakkhati rūpāni
cakkhu hi 'ssa na vijjatīti.</i> | Even if you were to bring
ten lamps to him, Kassapa,
he would see no forms at all—
for, he is one without any eye! | 769 |
| 8 | Then, the venerable Kassapa,gotta, moved by the devata, felt a sense of urgency. ¹⁹ | | |

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¹⁹ *Atha kho āyasmā kassapa,gotto tāya devatāya saṃvejito saṃvegam āpādīti.*